The Dreadful Day by Ademurewa Adesokan (Friday October 30th, 2015)

It was a chaotic day in the Adhikari and Perry-Carter's flat. The rain was pouring down lightly, and already, things were off to a rocky start. Arimyriah and Arigbeniri's 39-year-old mother (Taryn Adhikari) was in the kitchen, trying to prepare breakfast for the four children, each with very different tastes. In one corner of the open-plan kitchen, she stirred scrambled eggs for 9-year-old Arimyriah, who had her usual "almost full English" breakfast. In another, she poured milk over 7-year-old Arigbeniri's cornflakes. Almost 10-year-old Flora Perry's toast was carefully buttered and jammed, while almost 11-year-old Taylor Perry's porridge was heating up with just the right amount of honey.

Mum was a woman of great patience—or at least she usually was—but today, with everything so out of sync, her temper was starting to fray at the edges.

"Children, come and collect your breakfasts before they get cold!" Mum called out, hoping to settle the storm of complaints that was brewing in the kitchen.

"Coming to get our breakfasts," said Flora, who always loved breakfast time, as she skipped over to the counter.

One by one, the children arrived and collected their plates. Arigbeniri, always the first to sit down at the table, plopped into his chair, ready to devour his cornflakes. Flora Perry cheerfully grabbed her buttered toast, and Taylor Perry took his bowl of porridge, eager to start his day.

But then there was Arimyriah.

She sat down slowly, glaring at her plate, then pushed it away. "I don't really want what my mother made for me," she said with a frown, poking at her scrambled eggs with the tip of her fork. "It's not that I dislike it, I just... I'd rather have McDonald's breakfast this morning."

Mum’s head snapped up. “What?” Her voice was sharp. “What’s wrong with the breakfast I made? You’ve got eggs, beans, toast... it’s a full meal!”

Arimyriah, still sulking, shrugged. "I just don’t feel like it. I want something more exciting."

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Arimyriah!” Mum snapped, her patience thinning. “Be grateful for what I made for you! I don’t put all this effort into making breakfast just for you to turn your nose up at it."

Arimyriah’s eyes rolled, but before she could say anything else, Flora Perry piped up, “It’s not that bad, Arimyriah. Just try it.”

"Yeah," Taylor added, "It’s not McDonald’s, but it’s still food. You should be thankful.”

But Arimyriah was too grumpy to listen. She pushed her plate away even more forcefully, and the beans splashed onto the table.

"That's enough!" Mum snapped; her voice filled with frustration. "I don’t care if you don’t like it, but you WILL eat what you’re given. We don’t waste food in this house."

Arimyriah and Arigbeniri’s 44-year-old father (Isayu Adhikari), who had been quietly sipping his coffee, finally put his cup down with a sigh. He turned to Arimyriah and spoke in a calm but firm voice, “Your mummy is right, Arimyriah. She made that breakfast with love and care. We don’t have McDonald’s every day, and you need to be grateful for what we have.”

The words stung, but Arimyriah wasn’t ready to back down. She crossed her arms and huffed, looking out the window as if there was something far more exciting happening outside.

Mum’s face softened a little, but she wasn’t about to give in. “We’ll talk about this later. Right now, I expect you to eat.”

"Or there will be consequences," Dad added, his tone now serious.

Arimyriah muttered under her breath, clearly displeased, but reluctantly took a bite of her scrambled eggs. She tried her best to look as miserable as possible while chewing through the breakfast she had no interest in. The scrambled eggs, baked beans, and toast were far from what she had hoped for, but with each bite, she could feel her parents' watchful eyes on her.

It wasn't easy, but eventually, she ate her breakfast right down to the last crumb. Mum, Rochelle Perry (Taylor and Flora's 34-year-old mother who was superb at speaking English, Māori and NZSL), and Dad, 34-year-old Mr. Robert Carter Jr. (Taylor and Flora's English stepfather), exchanged proud glances as they watched their daughter finish her meal.

"Well done, sweetheart," Rochelle said with a smile, giving her a pat on the back. "You finished your breakfast, even though you didn't feel like it. That's showing responsibility."

"You ate it all, even when you didn't want to," Mr. Carter cheered. "Good job, Arimyriah."

Arimyriah managed a small smile, though it wasn't the biggest victory she'd ever had. But deep down, she knew that her parents were proud of her for sticking with it, even when things weren't going her way.

Mum and Dad were relieved too. They had hoped their children would show gratitude for what was on the table, even if it wasn't their first choice. They knew it wasn't always easy, especially with picky eaters. But seeing their kids eat what was served, without too much fuss, made them feel proud as parents.

The other children, Flora Perry and Taylor Perry, had eaten their breakfasts gratefully without complaint. They didn't make a fuss, enjoying their meals as they always did.

“You did well too, Flora. Taylor, you’ve both finished your food just as you should,” Mr. Carter added, acknowledging their cooperation with a proud nod.

Arimyriah glanced at her siblings, who were already finishing up their own breakfasts with a bit more enthusiasm. She felt a twinge of something—maybe pride or maybe just relief—but she didn’t feel so bad anymore. She had gotten through the task, and her parents were happy with her effort. That was enough for now.

Later, as the morning progressed and the rain began to pour harder outside, another argument arose. Dad, wanting to catch up on the news, changed the channel from Disney Junior to Sky News.

“Why did you change it?” Arimyriah asked, annoyed.
“I just want to see the news for a bit,” Dad responded, calmly but firmly.

“But I’m watching that! I want to see my show!” Arimyriah protested, her voice growing louder. “Can’t you just change it back?”

Dad, now a little tired of the back-and-forth, replied, “No, I’m watching the news right now. You can have your channel back once I’m done.”

The argument grew, with Arimyriah’s frustration building. “Change it back! Please!” she insisted, but Dad remained firm. Then, in a moment of frustration, Arimyriah blurted out, “I wish you’d just leave me alone!”

Her words hung in the air. For a moment, everyone was silent.

Dad, shocked by the sharpness of her words, looked at her sternly but with concern. “Arimyriah, I know you're upset, but you can’t talk to people like that. You know better than to make angry comments like that. Take a moment to calm down.”

Realizing she had overreacted, Arimyriah looked down, feeling embarrassed by her words. “I’m sorry, Dad,” she said quietly. “I didn’t mean it.”

Dad softened, walking over to her. “I know you didn’t mean it, but words like that can really hurt. Let’s take a break and calm down. I’ll finish watching my news, and then we can watch your show, okay?”

Arimyriah nodded, her mood lifting a little. “Okay. I’ll try not to get so mad next time.”

The two of them sat quietly for a while, with Arimyriah reflecting on how she could handle her frustrations better. After a few moments, Dad turned to her with a smile.

“You know, sometimes things don’t go the way we want them to, and that’s okay. It’s important to talk things through calmly and not let anger take over.”

Arimyriah smiled sheepishly. “I’ll try to remember that.”

When Arimyriah had finished calming down in the children’s bedroom, Rochelle went to the room and made this announcement that she made to the other children fifteen minutes prior, along with her current husband Mr Carter, “Ari, you need to have your bath, because we are all going out soon, we are going to Bromley and subsequently, the church in Croydon so you need to get ready,”. So Arimyriah got up from her bed, marched to the children’s bathroom which consisted of a toilet for the children to do their businesses, a washbasin, for the children to brush their teeth or wash their faces and a bathtub, where the children bathed themselves, there she met her brother Arigbeniri and the New Zealand siblings Flora and Taylor already waiting for her.

The bathroom was filled with laughter and warm steam as Taylor and Flora, the two older siblings, splashed around in the bathtub. They were having a blast, their faces glowing with happiness as they played with the bubbles that formed around

them. It wasn’t just about getting clean – it was about having fun, and for Taylor and Flora, that was the best part of bath time.

Meanwhile, Arimyriah and Arigbeniri, the younger siblings, waited patiently outside the bathroom. Arimyriah sat on the edge of the bed, tapping her foot, while Arigbeniri leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed and eyes wandering. Though they were eager to have their baths, they knew that their older siblings had to finish first. The wait was a little boring, but they tried to make the best of it.

Inside, Taylor let out a loud, delighted squeal as a giant bubble floated up to the ceiling. Flora, grinning from ear to ear, pushed a few more bubbles in her direction. Their giggles echoed in the room, making Arimyriah and Arigbeniri smile, even though they couldn’t join in yet.

After a few more minutes of splashing, it was time for Taylor and Flora to get out. They jumped out of the tub, water splashing everywhere as they grabbed their rose-coloured towels. They dried off quickly, their laughter still filling the air as they slipped into soft bathrobes. Taylor twirled around in hers, while Flora adjusted her robe, making sure it was snug. They were both ready to move on to the next thing.

As soon as the older siblings were done, it was finally Arimyriah and Arigbeniri’s turn. The younger two stood up from the bed, excited but still holding back their impatience. “You ready, Ari?” Arigbeniri asked, his voice full of excitement.

“I’m ready, just let me get my bath things,” Arimyriah replied, grabbing her towel and stepping toward the bathroom. Arigbeniri followed right behind her.

The two of them climbed into the bathtub, now filled with warm water and bubbles. Arimyriah closed her eyes for a moment, feeling the warmth surround her. She had been waiting for this moment all morning, and now, it was finally here. The sound of the bubbles popping around her made her smile, and she relaxed into the water.

"Feels so good," Arimyriah sighed, sinking deeper into the bubbles.

Arigbeniri splashed her with a handful of water, making her laugh. "You’re so dramatic, Ari!" he teased.

She smirked, flicking some bubbles at him in retaliation. "Says the one who was practically bouncing off the walls waiting for his turn."

As they soaked and played in the bubbles, the sound of their laughter joined that of Taylor and Flora from outside the bathroom. The morning had started off a little tense, but now, as they shared this small, silly moment together, things felt right again. The siblings were having fun, together, just like they always did.

After a little while, Arimyriah and Arigbeniri finished their baths, stepping out of the tub and drying off with their own towels. They donned their bathrobes and joined Taylor and Flora, ready for the next part of the day. With everyone clean and feeling fresh, it was time to get dressed, grab breakfast, and head out for their family outing.

The day was only just beginning, and even though there had been a few bumps along the way, the families were together, and that’s all that really mattered.

After fifteen minutes, Mum and Rochelle entered the bathroom. “Okay, children, time to get out of the bath, dry yourselves off, and get dressed for the journey,” Mum instructed.

Arimyriah and Arigbeniri groaned in unison, clearly not wanting bath time to end, but they didn't argue. They had learned by now that when Mum spoke, it was best to listen. Without hesitation, they began drying off as instructed.

Rochelle watched them with a satisfied smile. “Well done, you listened to your mother the first time,” she squealed in delight, clearly pleased by their cooperation.

Arimyriah, now wrapped in her soft pink bathrobe, walked out of the bathroom and into the children's room. Her long hair was still damp, but she didn't mind; the robe was warm and comforting.

Meanwhile, her younger brother Arigbeniri, with his glasses still perched on his nose, walked into the room without a bathrobe, his little body still wet from the bath.

When the children finished bathing and drying off, they moved to the children’s room to get dressed for their journey.

Taylor, the older of the two New Zealand siblings, chose his outfit with care. He pulled on a light blue long-sleeved shirt, layering it with a dark blue jumper. His blue jeans were a perfect match, and he wore light blue socks and pale blue trainers to complete the look. His contact lenses, a special birthday gift for his 10th birthday the previous November, now rested comfortably in his eyes, enhancing his clear blue gaze. On his right wrist, he wore a sky-blue analogue watch, which complemented his outfit perfectly.

Flora, his younger sister, was just as meticulous about her style but in a more tomboyish way. She chose a vibrant orange long-sleeved shirt, pairing it with blue dungarees that had trousers underneath for extra comfort. White socks peeked from beneath the cuffs of her dungarees, and her orange trainers matched her bold personality. She, too, wore a pair of contact lenses, along with a white hairband adorned with a flower on the right. Her bright, pink flower-shaped earrings sparkled in her ears, and a turquoise analogue watch sat on her left wrist, adding a final splash of colour to her ensemble.

Arimyriah, the older of the younger dual heritage siblings, carefully selected her outfit for the day. She wore a pink long-sleeved shirt with white spots scattered across the fabric, adding a touch of playfulness to her look. She paired the shirt with blue jeans, which were comfortable for the journey ahead, and finished off her ensemble with white socks and pink shoes, perfectly matching her outfit’s cheerful vibe.

Her younger brother, Arigbeniri, opted for a more laid-back style. He wore a simple white long-sleeved shirt, layering a green polo shirt on top for extra warmth and style. His blue jeans matched his sister’s, while grey socks peeked out from beneath his cuffs. For his footwear, he chose brown tank trainers, which were both practical and trendy, completing his outfit with ease.

The Indian, Indian-Nigerian, New Zealand, and British parents were all busy preparing for the outing in their bedroom, each dressing in their unique styles while ensuring they were ready for the day ahead.

Dad chose a light blue long-sleeved formal shirt with white thin stripes, paired with black trousers, white socks, and polished black shoes. He accessorized with a brown analogue watch on his right wrist, completing a smart yet comfortable look perfect for the day's activities.

Mum, despite it being autumn, opted for an orange short-sleeved shirt, which added a bright pop of colour to the cooler season. She paired it with blue jeans, black socks, and violet trainers, creating a relaxed and stylish outfit for the day.

Rochelle, ever the fashion-forward dresser, wore a rose long-sleeved shirt with a green cardigan layered on top. She paired it with a purple skirt, rose tights, and black loafers, creating an elegant and coordinated look.

Mr. Carter, not one to shy away from bold colours, donned a black short-sleeved shirt with a royal blue jumper layered on top. The contrast of the dark shirt and the vibrant jumper made for an eye-catching yet balanced look. He paired his top with blue jeans, light blue socks, and black loafers, which added a laid-back, comfortable touch to his otherwise sophisticated outfit. Completing his ensemble, he wore a pair of small, black rectangular-rimmed glasses, giving him a refined yet approachable appearance. The mix of boldness in the colours with subtle accessories like the glasses showed his keen sense of style, ready for both the journey and the day's activities.

Together, the parents had coordinated their outfits to ensure they were not only stylish but also comfortable and prepared for whatever the day might bring.

After the four adults and four children dressed up, they each added their jackets and coats to complete their outfits, preparing for the outing around The Greater London boroughs of Bromley and Croydon.

Arigbeniri wore a sleek black leather jacket, giving him a cool, edgy look. His sister Arimyriah, staying warm and stylish, donned a red and black checked winter coat, perfect for the chilly weather. Flora, the fashionable tomboy, wore a mustard winter coat that brightened up the grey skies, while Taylor chose a navy-blue waterproof coat, ready to face any unpredictable weather.

The adults, too, were well-prepared. Mr. Carter sported his favourite royal blue waterproof coat, striking a balance between style and practicality. Rochelle went for a violet winter coat, adding a touch of warmth and elegance to her outfit. Mum, staying true to her bold style, wore an orange winter coat that stood out against the autumn chill. Finally, Dad wrapped himself in a charcoal winter coat, a classic choice that kept him both warm and smart.

With everyone looking sharp and fully geared up for their day, the families were ready to set out on their journey, eager for the adventures that awaited them in Bromley and Croydon.

After both families had dressed up, Dad called the children for a family meeting. The Indian-Nigerian children and the Caucasian-New Zealand children walked into the adults' room, where both men and both women were waiting, their presence calm but purposeful.

"Sit down," Dad said, his tone firm but not unkind.

The children glanced at each other, a little nervous, but they obeyed, each finding a seat on the bed.

“You are not in trouble, any of you,” Mum assured them with a warm smile, her voice steady as she finished packing her braided hair into a tight bun. Her mixed heritage, Indian and Nigerian, gave her a natural grace as she pulled the final strands into place.

Rochelle, who had been adjusting her own look, added with a gentle smile, “We just want to explain to you where we’ll be going today.” She took out the low pigtails from her strawberry blonde hair and carefully brushed through the strands with a jewelled hairbrush. After a moment, she expertly pulled her hair back into neat pigtails once more, the act almost soothing in its rhythm.

Mr. Carter, who had been silently combing his dark brown fringe, looked up and finished the thought. “And we’ll go over the important rules to follow while we’re out.”

Dad, who was fully Indian, looked at the children with his usual calm authority. "Now, listen up, everyone," he said in his deep Indian accent. "Today, we have a busy day ahead. First, we will be going shopping in Bromley South at Sainsbury's and Marks & Spencer's. After that, we will head to the library in Bromley to read some books. If we have time, we will stop by Intu Bromley for you to do some Arts and Crafts, even though you’re getting to the middle-to-top end of childhood now. If there’s not enough time for that, we will go to the church in Croydon. I have some work to do before the service starts, or maybe even during it."

He paused for a moment, making sure the children were listening. "During or before the service, your mum will take Arigbeniri to get his hair cut at a place called Hair Star on Church Street, near Sabina, where Arimyriah got her hair done recently for her 9th birthday."

He looked at them with a slight smile, his voice softening. "After all that, we will go home. So, let’s make sure we stay on track today!"

After Dad finished explaining the plans for the day, Mr. Carter, who was Taylor and Flora's British stepdad and a Year 3 teacher

at Ramsden Hillview Primary School in Orpington, Bromley, South-East Outer London, spoke up. His tone was calm but firm as he laid down the rules.

“These are the rules for you to follow today,” he began, looking at all the children to make sure they were paying attention. “No messing about in the cars, at Bromley, or at the church. We’ll be busy, and it’s important you stay on track.” He paused for a moment, his expression serious. “No pretending to be sick either – we’ll be doing a lot today, and it’s not the time for that.”

He glanced around, ensuring that everyone understood. “Do not hurt people, feelings, or property. No being inappropriate, and always listen to US.” Mr. Carter looked directly at each child, emphasizing the importance of this rule.

“There’s one more thing,” he continued, his voice softening slightly. “No being fussy about the food at church. And most importantly, do not burn anything at the church, especially you, Arimyriah Adhikari.” He gave Arimyriah a pointed look. “That goes particularly for you, because I remember you burned a sheet of paper at the church two days ago. Let’s not repeat that, alright?”
After the lengthy chatter between the Indian and British men had finally subsided, the group of eight left Flat 5 on the second floor of the newly built building. They made their way down both flights of stairs, the scent of fresh paint and plaster still lingering in the air. Arimyriah, full of energy as usual, couldn’t resist the urge to slide down the banisters, but her mother—half Nigerian, half Indian—stopped her just in time, a firm hand on her shoulder.

"That's dangerous, Arimyriah," she warned gently, her voice steady despite the familiar mix of exasperation and concern.

The group reached the ground floor and stepped out into the crisp air outside. Mr. Carter, ever the organizer, immediately took charge of the travel arrangements. He looked over the group, then made a swift decision.

"The females will go in the Perry-Carter’s white BMW X5. It’s spacious—seven seats, all dark brown," he said, nodding toward the sleek vehicle parked nearby.

"That’s for you lot," he added with a wink.

"And the males," Mr. Carter continued, pointing to the red Toyota Aygo with its four black seats, "can take that one."

The families nodded in agreement, each ready to set off on their journey, with the quiet hum of anticipation filling the air.

Arigbeniri, Taylor, Mr. Carter, and Dad made their way to Dad’s small, red car. Arigbeniri climbed into the back seat, settling on the left, while Taylor took the seat beside him on the right. Dad slid into the front passenger seat, adjusting his seatbelt as he settled in, and Mr. Carter took his place behind the wheel, the engine purring to life as he started the car.

Arimyriah, Flora, Rochelle, and Mum made their way to Mr. Carter and Rochelle’s large, white SUV. Rochelle folded down the two brown back seats behind the middle row, as they weren’t needed, before taking her place in the driver’s seat. Mum slid into the seat next to her, while Arimyriah settled into the middle row on the left, and Flora took the seat on the right.

In the white car, Flora said, “Yesterday, when we went to Catford to visit Bella, her siblings, and her parents, we made a wonderful blueprint together for Wonder Park, a theme park we created. We didn’t finish it because it was time for us to head home.”

Her mother, Rochelle, smiled and replied, “You can finish it at the church, sweetheart. The lovely blueprint you designed with Bella Sharpe, her older sisters Ruby and Lottie, and her younger brother Freddy.”

Arimyriah, sitting beside Flora, was busy making up stories using a new app called Disney Princess Story Theatre. She was creating tales with Belle, the princess from Beauty and the Beast, choosing different places, surprises, and props in a section called Story Play. After that, she switched to Free Play,

where she could pick the setting, characters, props, and music without any restrictions.

However, while working on a story where Belle was sick, Arimyriah made Belle bigger. Her mother, noticing the change, accused her of enlarging the screen. Quickly, Arimyriah shrank Belle back to her normal size, hoping to avoid further attention.

In the small red car with the males, Taylor was asking Arigbeniri beside him if he was looking forward to getting his hair cut outside. Arigbeniri replied excitedly, "Yes, yes, yes!" Dad, sitting in the passenger seat, was teaching both the Caucasian and Indian-Nigerian boys (and Mr Carter) a song.

“H-i-p-p-o is the hippo,
H-i-p-p-o-p-o is the hippopo,
H-i-p-p-o-p-o-t-a-m-u-s is the hippopotamus,” he sang, full of energy, teaching the boys and Mr Carter a fun, three-verse song for them to repeat.

The boys and Mr Carter laughed as they joined in, repeating the lyrics and having fun as the small car made its way down the road.

Unfortunately, as both parties neared Bromley South, they took an unexpected detour. After leaving Pratts Bottom in the London Borough of Bromley, instead of heading towards Bromley Common, they took the route via Keston.

“Miss Rochelle why are we taking this way?” asked a curious Arimyriah. “It feels like we're heading straight to the church. Why are we taking this route instead of going via Bromley Common? I like that road, especially because it has a McDonald's,” she added.

“Why not?” Rochelle replied with a smile. “I’m just trying a different route, and the males are doing the same. It’s not just us.”

Fortunately, the detour came to an end when both the white SUV and the red car finally emerged from the winding roads of

Keston. They then made their way towards Bromley Common, carefully navigating through its various streets before heading toward Bromley South to continue their journey. The two vehicles followed different routes through the area, each manoeuvring around the quiet suburban roads and small residential lanes of Bromley Common.

After some time, both cars arrived at their intended stop—Sainsbury’s in Bromley North. The decision to park there was twofold. Firstly, they had planned to do some quick shopping, so it made sense to stop at the large supermarket. Secondly, they found there was no proper parking available at Bromley South, which had led them to reconsider their initial plans. Despite the minor detour, the groups were relieved to find a convenient parking space at Sainsbury’s, where they could rest for a moment before continuing their journey.

Once both Rochelle and Mr. Carter had finished parking their respective vehicles, Mr. Carter and Dad dismissed the boys from the red Toyota Aygo, while Rochelle and Mum ushered the girls out of the white BMW X5 SUV. The group—now eight in total—made their way towards the entrance of Sainsbury’s. As they walked through the car park, Arimyriah, the youngest, immediately noticed two Sainsbury's employees standing near the entrance. They were both dressed up in elaborate Halloween costumes, which caught her attention with their bright colours and unusual details. A woman named Maddison “Maddie” was dressed as a Halloween princess, her rose-coloured gown shimmering slightly under the store’s artificial lighting. Arimyriah was taken aback by how much effort had gone into her outfit—her dress was sparkling, almost magical. Beside her stood Maximus “Max”, a man dressed as a Halloween pirate, his dark pirate hat cocked to one side and an oversized sword strapped to his waist. He looked like something straight out of a storybook, and Arimyriah couldn’t help but stare in awe.

"Mum, I wish we did Halloween at our house, and I bet the New Zealand siblings would like it too,” Arimyriah said wistfully, looking up at her mum with wide eyes. She was the kind of girl who loved costumes and the idea of dressing up. The excitement of sweets, spooky costumes, and the sheer fun of

pretending to be something else appealed to her playful nature. She paused for a moment, then added, "I know Halloween isn't for Christians, and we're no exception," with a small sigh, as if she already understood why, it wasn't something they could participate in, even if part of her longed for it.

Her mother, Mum, who was often the voice of reason in the Adhikari family, sighed softly. She had a steady presence about her, calm yet firm, with a strong Indian accent that carried an air of wisdom. She was used to balancing her children's wishes with the family's values, and this conversation wasn't any different. She knew how to navigate Arimyriah's curiosity and longing with patience.

"Mum," Arimyriah began, almost pleading, "why can't we just have a little bit of fun like the others? Just one day…" Her voice trailed off, her thoughts lingering on the idea of joining in with the Halloween festivities. She glanced at Mum, waiting for an answer.

Mum looked down at her with a gentle frown. She always tried to explain things in a way that Arimyriah would understand, but it wasn't always easy. "Arimyriah, Halloween is not for us. It's a celebration for atheists. I know you all might enjoy dressing up and collecting sweets, but Halloween is about witches and darkness, not light. We don't partake in that. It goes against our values."

Arimyriah's shoulders slumped slightly, her excitement turning into a quiet understanding. Mum always had a way of making her realise the bigger picture. Arimyriah wasn't sure she completely agreed with Mum's perspective, but she knew that her mum had reasons for everything.

Mum softened her tone, sensing her daughter's disappointment. She wasn't immune to Arimyriah's hopes and dreams, but she also had a deep-rooted belief in their family's traditions. "But don't be sad, dear. Tomorrow, you have your undersea party at half past one until five o'clock. You'll be attending it with your brother and the Perry siblings. You should be happy to have something fun like that to look forward to," Mum said warmly,

gently brushing a strand of hair from Arimyriah's face. "You'll be dressing up, just in a different way. And no witches or darkness in sight."

Rochelle, who had been listening quietly from behind, nodded approvingly. She was more relaxed and practical compared to Mum. Rochelle had no problem letting the kids be kids, and though she agreed with Mum's perspective on Halloween, she didn't mind letting them have a bit of fun with other events. Rochelle often found herself playing the role of the mediator when things got tough. She flashed a reassuring smile at Arimyriah. "You'll have a blast at the party, darling. Who needs Halloween when you've got an undersea party with dolphins and fishes?"

Arimyriah, now comforted by her mum's words and Rochelle's kind smile, smiled back. She wasn't entirely convinced, but she appreciated the positive spin. As they entered the store, Arimyriah's thoughts wandered back to the undersea party, imagining herself as a mermaid surrounded by her friends. Maybe that was enough fun for now.

The octet moved through the aisles of the store in a well-organized, almost rhythmic fashion. Dad, ever the experienced shopper, took charge with the trolley, and everyone quickly followed suit, picking out their assigned items from the list. Arimyriah, as usual, couldn't resist lingering on the brightly coloured jars of strawberry jam. She picked one up, inspecting the label with an air of curiosity before dropping it into the trolley with a satisfied nod.

"Make sure we get the spreadable butter," Rochelle reminded, and Arimyriah, knowing her mum's preferences, grabbed a tub of it from the dairy aisle. Flora and Taylor, walking a bit ahead, were already eyeing the packet of digestive biscuits.

"This should be enough for the week," Flora said, holding up the biscuits for approval. Taylor grabbed the granulated sugar next, and then they both moved on to the pasta aisle.

As they picked up the necessary groceries—eggs, tomatoes, cheese, and the all-important ketchup— Mr. Carter, who had been perusing the pasta section, exchanged a brief, amused glance. They'd reached the "special treat" part of the shopping list. Mr. Carter's eyes scanned the shelves, looking for something indulgent, something fun, for the whole group.

After a moment's thought, he nodded to himself. "As a special treat, I'll buy everyone some pink iced doughnuts," he thought, his mouth quirking into a smile. He was aware of how unhealthy sugary treats could be, but it had been a long week, and a small treat wouldn't hurt. Plus, he'd noticed how the kids' faces lit up whenever he suggested something sweet.

"Here we go," Mr. Carter said to Max as he grabbed the box of doughnuts, their pink icing gleaming under the store's fluorescent lights. The sweet aroma of the sugar and dough wafted up, and he could already imagine the smiles on everyone's faces when they saw the treat.

Meanwhile, Rochelle and Mum finished picking up the necessary items—milk, both whole and evaporated, plain flour, and the washing products. The latter was something Rochelle always made sure to double-check. She grabbed a bottle of washing-up liquid and a packet of washing powder for clothes, knowing that these essentials could sometimes be forgotten.

Arimyriah tugged on Mum's sleeve as they moved towards the checkout. "Mum, look! Doughnuts!" she exclaimed, pointing at the box Mr. Carter was holding.

Rochelle looked over, and a small smile tugged at her lips. "Oh, Max, you've really outdone yourself this time," she said, her voice warm with affection.

Dad nodded in agreement, though he couldn't hide his amusement. "It's always something with you, isn't it?" he said with a wink, but there was no denying the cheer the doughnuts would bring.

Once everything was in the trolley and everyone had their little piece of the shopping done, they made their way to the checkout. As the register beeped through the items, Arimyriah couldn't help but glance longingly at the pink doughnuts again. When the total was settled, Mr. Carter placed the doughnuts on top of the pile of groceries.

"Don't eat these all at once," he teased, even as he handed out one doughnut to each of the kids.

"They're a special treat," Rochelle added, smiling knowingly as she placed the rest of the groceries into bags. "But don't go overboard with the sugar. We've got enough goodies here to last the week."

With bags in hand and the sweet scent of doughnuts in the air, the octet made their way back to the cars. They might not have bought the healthiest of foods, but they had everything they needed – and with the pink iced doughnuts to share, it was a shopping trip the kids would remember fondly.

The octet munched on their doughnuts as they made their way to Marks and Spencer's in Bromley South. Mr. Carter had a specific purpose for the visit: he wanted to purchase a gift for one of his nine brothers, Roscoe, the third youngest of the eleven Carter siblings. Roscoe's birthday was in twenty days, and Mr. Carter thought it would be thoughtful to buy him something special, even though they lived far apart – Roscoe resided in Hanworth, a district in the London Borough of Hounslow in West Outer London.

"We need to go to Marks and Spencer's now as I need to buy a gift for my younger brother Roscoe," Mr. Carter explained as the octet entered the store, which combined a clothing section with a grocery shop.

Suddenly, as they browsed through the aisles, Arimyriah caught a glimpse of herself in a nearby mirror and exclaimed, "DADDY, I'VE GOT CHICKENPOX!" Her dramatic claim startled the group, but Dad quickly realised that his 9-year-old daughter was

overreacting. He crouched down to her level, his expression a mix of patience and mild frustration.

“You don’t have chickenpox, Ari,” he said firmly but gently. “There are just a few spots on your face. And you’ll be fine.”

Arimyriah pouted, realizing her attempt to create a fuss hadn’t worked. He and Mr. Carter shook their heads with a small smile, then continued shopping, determined to find the perfect gift for Mr Carter’s brother Roscoe.

In the clothing shop, Mr. Carter headed straight to the Men’s section, his eyes scanning the rows of neatly arranged racks where suits were displayed. He was determined to find the perfect suit for his younger brother Roscoe. After some deliberation, he came across a selection of suits in various colours and styles: a plain brown suit, a light grey suit in both plain and striped patterns, and a black suit available in similar styles. Carefully considering his options, Mr. Carter decided on the black striped suit, thinking it was both elegant and versatile – just the right choice for Roscoe.

After selecting the suit, Mr. Carter thought it would be practical to include something else in his gift – a pack of underwear. He led the octet to the men’s underwear section, where he picked out a pack of simple white underpants. The group waited patiently, some idly looking around at the displays, while Mr. Carter finalized his choices.

With the suit and underwear in hand, the octet proceeded to the checkout, ready to complete their shopping adventure at Marks and Spencer’s.

Outside Marks and Spencer, Rochelle turned to her 9-year-old tomboyish daughter. “Flo, because it’s your birthday next Saturday and you’ll be turning ten, we’re planning a birthday party, and on Sunday after church, you’ll be getting your hair cut and styled. What style do you want your hair to be when it’s styled differently? And what theme do you want for your party this year? Most importantly, because the flat we’re in is too small, where would you like to have the party?”

Flora, with her blonde hair flowing freely down her back, thought for a moment before answering, “I’d like my hair crimped, Mummy. For the party, I want a pool party with a pirate and princess theme at a leisure centre in Peckham, South Inner London.”

Rochelle smiled, clearly delighted with Flora’s choice. “Sounds like fun! I’ll tell the hairdresser to crimp your hair, and I’ll book the party at Peckham Pulse Leisure Centre tonight before it gets fully booked.”

“We will go to the library to read books, age-appropriate or not, and then… I don’t think it will be convenient for you to go to Arts and Crafts in Intu Bromley,” Mum said. “It’s already four o’clock, and we need to be at the church in an hour, depending on how long we spend in the library.”

With that, the octet made their way to Bromley’s Library, pushing through the revolving doors. Once inside, they collected a variety of books – both age-appropriate and not, and a mix of fiction and non-fiction. Taylor grabbed a copy of Jack and the Beanstalk, Flora picked The Very Hungry Caterpillar, Arimyriah selected Cinderella, and Arigbeniri chose Elmer.

The adults, too, picked out their own books. For the next half hour, everyone sat together, reading quietly. The kids immersed themselves in their books, while the adults read alongside them, making sure the time spent at the library would be both enjoyable and productive.

The group continued on their way to the cars, though there was a slight disappointment among the children. Taylor’s face fell as he imagined the fun he’d miss out on at the arts and crafts session. Flora, too, wasn’t thrilled about having to skip the puppet-making, her mind already picturing the tiger puppet she wanted to create.

As they reached the cars, Rochelle gave them all a reassuring smile. "We’ll make sure to go to arts and crafts another time,"

she said, placing a hand on Flora’s shoulder. "You’ll get to make that tiger puppet soon enough."

Flora’s expression softened slightly, though she still seemed reluctant. “I guess… but I really wanted to make one today,” she muttered.

Mr. Carter, noticing the mood, decided to lighten it. "You’ll have plenty of fun tomorrow at the undersea party, right? Don’t forget the jellyfish decorations they’ll probably have. And maybe some cool party hats! You’ll have a smashing good time. Plus, we’ll have all sorts of chances to make things in the future – arts and crafts will always be there," he added, trying to cheer them up.

Taylor perked up a little at the mention of the party. "Undersea party! That does sound cool,” he said, his earlier disappointment forgotten for the moment.

“See? Tomorrow’s party will make up for today’s missed arts and crafts,” Mr. Carter continued, flashing a reassuring grin at the group.

Rochelle nodded in agreement. "Exactly. Now, let's get to church, and then we can look forward to tomorrow’s fun!"

The children, though still a bit disappointed, brightened up at the thought of the upcoming party, and with that, the group piled into their cars, ready for the next part of their evening.

When the females were travelling, Flora and Arimyriah still seemed a bit disappointed.

“I wanted to make a princess puppet,” Arimyriah cried, her voice trembling with near tears.

“I wanted to make a tiger puppet today,” Flora added with a sigh. “But, Ari, we don’t always get what we want. We need to understand that some circumstances are beyond our control. Besides, there’s the three-hour, thirty-minute undersea party tomorrow from half past one to five o’clock. You should look forward to that instead,” she said reassuringly.

Mum said, “Some things are beyond our wishes, but we must learn to deal with them. Also, I need to take your brother to get his hair cut in Croydon before the service today, so that’s another reason we had to leave now.”

Rochelle, who was driving, turned to Flora and added, “At church, you can finish the blueprint for Wonder Park that you’ve been working on with Bella, Ruby, Freddy, and Lottie before the service starts.”

The two girls nodded, trying to find comfort in their mother’s words, as the car hummed along the road toward their destination.

The males enjoyed their journey from Bromley to Croydon without any hassle or complaints. Both groups travelled through West Wickham, Shirley, East Croydon, and West Croydon before arriving at the church’s current building on Tamworth Road.

Once they arrived, everyone disembarked from the cars and headed inside the building, making their way upstairs. Taylor settled down and watched some live TV on his mother’s iPad. Flora got to work finishing her blueprint for Wonder Park. Meanwhile, Arimyriah entertained herself by watching Nick Jr. Too on the church’s TV. Arigbeniri, however, kept his coat on, ready to head to Hair Star just down the road to get his hair cut.

Mum was getting ready to take Arigbeniri to Hair Star, but before they could leave, she prepared lunch for the family. She microwaved frozen mashed potatoes and meatballs and made some gravy from scratch in a mug. The kitchen buzzed with the sound of the microwave, the clinking of utensils, and the aroma of warming food.

Upstairs, Dad was busy in his office, focusing on an important work project, while Mr Carter worked in his own office, preparing lesson plans for his Year 3 class. In the living room, Rochelle stretched and flowed through her yoga routine, the calm background music contrasting with the bustle elsewhere in the building.

Once the food was ready, Mum called Taylor, Flora, Arimyriah, and Arigbeniri to the dining area. The children gathered around a sleek black table, plates in hand. The mashed potatoes and meatballs were met with varying degrees of enthusiasm. While Taylor, Flora, and Arigbeniri ate without complaint, Arimyriah refused. She crossed her arms and declared, “I want pizza from Pizza Hut. It’s just down the road!”

Hearing this, Mr Carter opened his office door and appeared in the doorway. His tone was calm but firm as he addressed her. “Ari, if you eat your mash and meatballs, I’ll buy a small pizza for dinner later. If you don’t, there will be no pizza at all.” He gave her a meaningful look before shutting the door and returning to his work.

Arimyriah glanced at her plate, frowning. The rest of the family continued their meal in peace, leaving her to ponder her decision. But she eventually ate the food.

After finishing his meal, Arigbeniri eagerly stood up. His mother asked, “Arigbeniri, are you ready for your first-ever haircut outside?”
“Yes!” he exclaimed with excitement. Together, the Indian-Nigerian mother and son walked to Hair Star for the much-anticipated haircut.

At Hair Star, the atmosphere was lively. Black African customers were having their hair washed, styled, braided, and relaxed. The air buzzed with chatter and the hum of clippers.

When it was Arigbeniri’s turn, an Igbo barber named Oliver welcomed him. Oliver removed Arigbeniri’s red glasses, draped a protective gown over him, and prepared his clippers. But as soon as the clippers neared, Arigbeniri shrieked, “NO!”

Confused, Oliver asked, “No what?”
“I’m afraid of the clippers!” Arigbeniri replied, his voice trembling.

His mother, visibly disappointed, reminded him, “You’ve been asking for this haircut since last week. Now you’ve wasted the barber’s time and my money.”

Oliver offered a solution, “Would you prefer scissors instead?”
But Arigbeniri adamantly shouted, “NO! I DON’T WANT MY HAIR CUT!”

Resigned, his mother apologised to Oliver and led Arigbeniri out of the shop, the barber’s fee paid but the haircut abandoned.

Mum and Arigbeniri returned to the church, still without a haircut. Mum's money had been wasted, as well as the barber’s time. Once they were upstairs, Mum explained to Dad, who was working on the computer, that Arigbeniri had been too afraid of the clippers. Even when Oliver offered to use quieter scissors, Arigbeniri still refused, so they left empty-handed.

Dad listened and then calmly replied, "Before the children can go to the undersea party tomorrow, I’ll give Arigbeniri the haircut myself, at home."

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Mum sighed, but then mused with a reassuring smile, “Don’t worry, Dad will cut my son’s hair in the morning, and then we’ll go to the party in the afternoon.”

The children, a lively mix of Indian-Nigerian and New Zealand heritage, buzzed with excitement for the undersea-themed party. Mum hoped everything would go smoothly.

At 18:00, a family arrived at the Adhikari home for the Bible Study service scheduled an hour later. The visitors were Pastor Azim Ketaki, a 51-year-old Indian man, and his two sons: nearly 18-year-old Niya and 11-year-old Anukampa, who had special needs.

Hearing their arrival, Dad went downstairs to greet them. "Good evening, Pastor Azim," he said warmly.

"Good evening, Pastor IS," Pastor Azim replied, using Dad’s familiar nickname with a respectful nod.

Before long, Arimyriah came racing downstairs, her energy and curiosity lighting up the room. She greeted the Ketakis enthusiastically but soon noticed the absence of a familiar face. Turning to Niya, she asked, "Where’s Anukampa’s mummy?"

Niya offered a polite explanation. "Mummy isn’t feeling well," he said gently. "She has a tummy ache, so she’s in bed resting."

Arimyriah went back upstairs, a mischievous glint in her eye. She wandered into the living room just as Flora proudly finished drawing her blueprint for Wonder Park. With a beaming smile, Flora held up her work to show Taylor and Arimyriah.

Taylor was the first to respond, his face lighting up. "This is a beautiful plan for the theme park," he said earnestly.

Flora’s excitement grew as she pointed out the details. "Look! There’s a merry-go-round with dinosaurs instead of horses, a monster-themed roller coaster, and even a digger train," she explained.

"That’s really creative," Taylor added. "I also like the idea of face painting—people becoming dinosaurs of their choice. And those dragon dodgers? Brilliant!"

Arimyriah, however, frowned, her annoyance growing with every word. Finally, she snapped. "Put that away!" she instructed sharply.

Flora ignored her, too focused on Taylor’s encouraging feedback. "And here," she continued, "is where visitors can design their own fossils in the dig zone."

Arimyriah could stand it no longer. Her patience shattered, and she snatched the blueprint from Flora’s hands.

"WONDER PARK ISN’T REAL, AND IT NEVER COULD BE REAL!" she shouted, her voice trembling with frustration. Without hesitation, she marched to the nearest heater and shoved the blueprint inside. The paper caught fire, curling into ash as the flames consumed it.

"AND EVEN IF IT WAS," she continued, her voice rising, "IT WOULD BE THE LAST PLACE IN THE WORLD I’D EVER WANT TO VISIT!"

Flora stared in horror at the heater, where her blueprint for Wonder Park had been reduced to smouldering ash. Tears welled in her eyes as she turned to Arimyriah, her voice trembling with rage and heartbreak.

"OH NO!" she cried. "OH ARI, LOOK WHAT YOU’VE DONE TO MY BLUEPRINT FOR WONDER PARK!"

Realising the extent of Flora’s distress, Arimyriah instinctively reached toward the heater, her hand outstretched as if to retrieve the ruined blueprint. "I didn’t mean—" she started, but before she could get any closer, Flora grabbed her wrist firmly.

"Stop it, Ari!" Flora shouted, yanking Arimyriah’s hand away from the flames. "You’ll burn yourself! It’s too dangerous!"

Arimyriah froze, guilt and panic flickering across her face as she glanced at the ash-filled heater.

Flora’s tears spilled over as she pointed a trembling finger at Arimyriah. "I’m going to tell my mummy on you, Arimyriah Adhikari," she said through sobs. "You burned a blueprint that I worked so hard to create!"

Taylor stepped in, placing a comforting hand on Flora’s shoulder. "Flora, let’s go tell Mum together," he said gently, his protective instincts kicking in.

Flora nodded, still sniffling, and let Taylor guide her toward the door. She shot one last heartbroken glance at Arimyriah before leaving the room.

Arimyriah stood frozen, her mind racing with a mix of guilt, shame, and defensiveness. She stared at the heater, the ashes of the blueprint a stark reminder of her impulsive actions.

Taylor and Flora stormed into the yoga space where Rochelle was practicing, their faces flushed with emotion. Flora, tears streaming down her cheeks, ran straight to her mother.

“MUMMY!” she cried, her voice breaking. “ARI HAS GONE TOO FAR! SHE BURNT MY BLUEPRINT FOR WONDER PARK BECAUSE SHE SAID IT WAS TOO BOYISH!”

Rochelle immediately stopped mid-pose, her serene expression replaced with one of shock and concern. She turned to Flora, gently wiping her tears.

“Flora, tell me exactly what happened,” Rochelle said, her tone calm but firm.

Taylor chimed in, “She didn’t just burn it, Mum. She nearly set the church on fire in the process!”

Rochelle’s eyes widened. She stood up, her yoga mat forgotten, and turned toward the stairs.

When Dad, Pastor Azim, Niya, and Anukampa entered the room, Arimyriah looked up nervously, already sensing the severity of the situation.

Dad’s voice was stern and demanding. “WHY DID YOU BURN THE BLUEPRINT ANOTHER GIRL WORKED HARD TO PRODUCE?!” he shouted, his tone echoing through the room.

Arimyriah froze for a moment before blurting out, “It wasn’t me, it was my brother!”

The room went silent for a beat, and then Dad’s voice boomed even louder. “YOUR BROTHER HAS BEEN IN THE OFFICE THE ENTIRE TIME. DO NOT LIE TO ME! IT WAS YOU! I KNOW IT WAS YOU, AND YOU TRIED TO PIN THE BLAME ON YOUR INNOCENT BROTHER!”

“But… But…” stammered Arimyriah, tears welling in her eyes.

“NO BUTS!” Dad roared, his frustration palpable. “Don’t you dare try to deflect responsibility! Your actions have consequences, and you will face them. GO DOWNSTAIRS! I will deal with you after the Bible study service at half past eight.”

Arimyriah hesitated, her mind racing. “But what about the party?” she asked, her voice tinged with curiosity and a hint of fear.

Dad’s expression hardened. “We’ll see about that,” he said firmly. “Just go downstairs. A service is about to start, and it’s too late to cancel your trip to the undersea party.”

He paused, letting the weight of his words sink in. “If you had done this last week, I would have said, ‘NO PARTY FOR YOU!’ without hesitation. But tomorrow, you will attend because it’s already arranged. However, your behaviour will determine what happens next.”

Arimyriah and Dad descended the stairs together, the weight of their earlier exchange still lingering in the air. The hall was quiet, filled with anticipation as the congregation settled into their seats for the ninety-minute Bible study service.

Dad, with his usual calm yet commanding presence, stood at the front to lead the evening’s session. He began with a heartfelt prayer, his voice resonating through the room as he asked for wisdom, forgiveness, and strength for everyone present.

After the prayer, Dad opened his Bible to a passage from the Old Testament. His voice softened as he explained the context and deeper meaning of the scripture, weaving its lessons into the challenges of modern life. Arimyriah listened, her emotions a mix of guilt and awe at her father’s ability to inspire others despite the earlier tension.

When Dad finished his teaching, Pastor Azim stepped forward. With a warm smile and a steady voice, he spoke about the importance of gratitude and giving, encouraging the congregation to reflect on their blessings. The tithes and offerings were collected, a quiet hum of reverence filling the room.

To close the service, Pastor Azim led a final prayer, his words a gentle reminder of hope and perseverance. As the congregation began to disperse, Dad glanced at Arimyriah, his expression firm but not unkind. She knew the conversation they’d started earlier was far from over.

Here’s a continuation of both the post-service discussion and an exploration of another angle:

As the congregation filtered out of the hall, exchanging quiet farewells and words of encouragement, Dad approached Arimyriah. His expression was a mix of disappointment and resolve, a reminder of the conversation they needed to finish.

“Come with me,” he said firmly, guiding her to a quieter corner of the church hall. Pastor Azim and Mr. Carter gave them space, understanding the gravity of the moment.

Dad crouched slightly to meet Arimyriah at eye level. “I want you to understand something,” he began, his tone calmer than before but still serious. “What you did tonight wasn’t just about a blueprint or even the church building. It was about trust, responsibility, and respect—for others and for yourself.”

Arimyriah shifted uncomfortably, unable to meet his gaze. “I’m sorry,” she mumbled, her voice barely audible.

Dad sighed, his stern demeanour softening slightly. “I believe you are, but sorry isn’t enough on its own. You need to show it through your actions. We’ll talk more at home, but I expect you to think about how you can make amends—not just to Flora, but to everyone who was affected.”

Meanwhile, upstairs, Flora sat with her mum, Rochelle, recounting the evening’s events with a mix of frustration and sadness. “Mummy, I worked so hard on that blueprint,” she said, tears welling up again. “I just don’t understand why Ari would do something so mean.”

Rochelle hugged her daughter tightly. “I know, sweetheart,” she said soothingly. “Sometimes people act out because they’re feeling things they don’t know how to express. It doesn’t make what she did right, but maybe we can help her understand how much her actions hurt you.”

Flora nodded slowly, wiping her eyes. “Do you think she’ll ever say sorry and mean it?”

“I think she will,” Rochelle replied. “But it might take time. And while she’s learning, you need to keep being the kind and creative person you are.”

As the family gathered downstairs, the air was filled with a mix of calm and tension. The evening had been a long one, and it was finally time for everyone to return to their homes in Mitcham, South-West Outer London, and Sittingbourne, Kent.

Mr. Carter turned to Dad with a question. “Mr. Adhikari, since Ari requested pizza earlier, may I stop by Pizza Hut to pick up Margherita, Pepperoni, Chicken Supreme, and Barbeque Chicken pizzas for everyone?”

Dad nodded, his voice firm yet fair. “Mr. Carter, you can, but only one slice per person tonight—it’s late. And Arimyriah,” he glanced at his daughter, “will not be having any. She needs to understand the consequences of her actions after deliberately burning Flora’s blueprint.”

“DAD!” groaned Arimyriah, her frustration evident as she overheard his response.

“That’s right,” Mum and Rochelle chimed in unison, their voices steady with authority. “You burnt something that someone worked hard on, and now you’re facing the consequences.”

Arimyriah crossed her arms, her lips pressed into a pout, but she knew better than to argue further.

Taylor gave Flora a reassuring pat on the shoulder, whispering, “Don’t worry, we’ll still have a good evening.” Flora smiled faintly, her earlier sadness starting to fade as the family’s support surrounded her.

Mr. Carter grabbed his coat, heading out to collect the pizzas. As the family prepared to leave, the atmosphere felt lighter, the evening’s lesson lingering as a reminder of accountability and the importance of respect.

At Pizza Hut in Croydon, Mr. Carter carefully placed his order with the manager. He requested four pizzas: margherita, pepperoni, chicken supreme, and barbeque chicken. Once the pizzas were freshly prepared and boxed, Mr. Carter paid for them, thanked the staff, and made his way back to the church, the enticing smell of the pizzas wafting through the air.

Back at the church, the families began their journey home. Mum, Rochelle, Taylor, and Flora piled into the Perry-Carters’ white BMW X5, while Dad, Mr. Carter, Arimyriah, and Arigbeniri climbed into the Adhikaris’ red Toyota Aygo.

Inside the car, Dad made a deliberate choice to sit in the back with Arimyriah instead of his usual place in the front. Arigbeniri, unbothered, took the front passenger seat beside Mr. Carter, who was driving.

The car was filled with an uneasy silence as they started their drive toward Sittingbourne. Feeling the weight of her actions,

Arimyriah hesitated before softly speaking, “Dad, I’m sorry for what I did to that girl’s work.”

Her words, however, didn’t have the intended effect. Dad’s face darkened, and his voice thundered through the car, “ARIMYRIAH, I SPOKE TO YOU TWO DAYS AGO NOT TO PUT ANYTHING ON FIRE! IF YOU SAY THAT AGAIN OR ANYTHING SIMILAR, I WILL ASK MR CARTER TO PARK THE CAR SO I CAN SLAP YOU!”

The harshness of his words made Arimyriah shrink in her seat, her head hanging low with a mixture of sadness and guilt. The atmosphere in the car grew heavy, and no one dared to speak further.

As the car sped through the streets, Arimyriah’s mind raced. Her earlier defiance now seemed like a distant memory, replaced by a growing realisation of the gravity of her actions and the disappointment she had caused.

Here’s how the story continues:

Unfortunately, both cars had to take a diversion through the quiet town of Faversham, near Sittingbourne. The detour added time to their journey, but the children remained unusually silent, sensing the tension that lingered in the air.

When the octet finally arrived home, they disembarked from the cars, carrying bags of shopping from Sainsbury’s, clothing from Marks and Spencer, and the warm pizzas from Pizza Hut. Mr. Carter and Rochelle locked the car doors as everyone made their way up two sets of stairs to Flat 5, located on the second floor of the building.

Inside the flat, the aroma of the four pizzas—margherita, pepperoni, chicken supreme, and barbeque chicken—filled the air. Arimyriah’s eyes lit up briefly at the sight of the pizzas, but her excitement was short-lived.

Mum, with a firm yet calm tone, addressed her, “Arimyriah, you will not have any pizza until tomorrow morning, the morning of the undersea party. Now, go and prepare for bed.”

The disappointment was evident on Arimyriah’s face, but she didn’t dare argue. Without a word, she turned and trudged off to her room, her footsteps heavy with reluctance.

After brushing her teeth and changing into light pink and grey horizontally striped, long-sleeved pyjamas, Arimyriah settled into the children’s room. Soon, the other three children joined her and climbed onto the two bunk beds. Flora eagerly scaled the ladder to the top bunk of her and Taylor’s bed, while Arimyriah and Arigbeniri cosily shared the bottom bunk of their own bed.

Five minutes later, Rochelle entered the room, dressed in a hot pink onesie, holding a storybook titled Shrinking Powder. She settled in to read the tale to the four children, all in their mid to late childhood. As the story unfolded, Dad appeared, dressed in a long, short-sleeved grey nightshirt. He joined the group for a comforting nighttime prayer, bringing a sense of calm and unity before the children drifted off to sleep.

When Arimyriah squeezed her brother too tightly, he protested softly, “Stop! I don’t want anybody squeezing me. Scratches are all over my face.”

Moments later, he repeated it louder, his voice carrying enough urgency to bring Mum and Dad into the children’s room.

“What’s going on here?” Mum asked, scanning the scene.
“Arigbeniri doesn’t want anybody squeezing him because there are scratches on his face,” Dad explained, frowning as he knelt to inspect his son’s cheeks.

The Adhikari family gathered in the living room-kitchen to address the situation. Mum, ever the problem solver, reached for the jar of coconut oil from the cupboard. “This should help with the irritation,” she said, gently massaging the oil onto Arigbeniri’s face. “Does that feel better, sweetheart?”

“My face still has marks, so not really,” he grumbled, his small voice tinged with frustration.

Next, Dad decided to try something from their home remedy arsenal. He brought out a bottle of children’s cough syrup. “Here, son. A teaspoon of this might help calm things down,” he said encouragingly. “How about now?”
Arigbeniri shook his head. “Still not,” he muttered, looking downcast.

Then, Mr. Carter, their stepdad, joined in. Though unfamiliar with traditional remedies, he warmed some palm oil, a staple in Nigerian and Indian households. “Let’s give this a try,” he said, offering Arigbeniri a teaspoon. “Better now?”
“NO!” Arigbeniri exclaimed, frustration spilling over.

Finally, Rochelle stepped in, her tone both calm and inquisitive. “Alright, let’s figure this out. Did the Igbo barber accidentally scratch you with the clippers when we went to Croydon?” she asked.
“No,” Arigbeniri replied firmly.

“Maybe you scratched yourself by mistake after leaving the barber without getting your haircut?” she suggested.
“Neither,” he said, his voice steady but serious. “Somebody intentionally scratched me earlier today.”

Rochelle’s brow furrowed as she pieced things together. “Was it your sister? Did she scratch you when we left the church?”
Arimyriah immediately interjected, “I didn’t mean to hurt him! I was just upset because he wouldn’t get a haircut at the salon.”

Mum’s expression hardened as she addressed Arimyriah. “You didn’t accidentally scratch your brother’s face,” she said firmly. “You did it deliberately, and that’s not acceptable.”

She pointed to the top bunk of the children’s bunk bed. “Tonight, you’re sleeping up there. I don’t want you sharing a bed with your brother until his face is better. If I catch either of you on the same bed before then, there will be serious consequences,” she warned, her voice steady but resolute.

Arimyriah climbed up to the top bunk, her head hanging low. She settled into the bed and closed her eyes, guilt and regret swirling within her. Mum lingered for a moment, her gaze softening as she looked at her children. With a sigh, she switched off the lights and quietly left the room.

The darkness enveloped them, but the tension in the air lingered. It would take time for forgiveness to mend the small rift between the siblings.

THE END